

Memorable Messages in Professional Female Athletes

by

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored memorable messages that professional female athletes have recalled throughout their careers. This study sought to understand what types of memorable messages are recalled by female athletes that have made it to the top of their sports at the professional level and to understand whether the recalled memorable messages were gendered or not. Respondents were asked via a survey questionnaire to recall a memorable message, describe the meaning and context of the message and finally what effect, if any, the message had on them. Qualitative survey questionnaire responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Results indicated that memorable messages were not gendered in any way but there were several relevant themes, which included: wisdom, performance, instruction, motivation, dedication and identity. These results are new to the field of memorable messages within the field of sport and hold significance for future research.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Research with memorable messages within the context of sport is still relatively new. This study looks to explore the impact of memorable messages with a more narrow focus that has not been explored before by considering how professional female athletes are affected by the messages they receive and what messages are memorable to them. It is important to discuss women in sport as there are still a lot of gender issues and problems that women in sport face. Consideration of both the positive and negative aspects of women in sport is necessary because we still see a gender gap with opportunities and equality compared to men. These issues are relevant in the modern era as we work towards having a gender equal society. Sport can create cultural and societal norms and so looking at female athletes and women in sport is important as this can also translate into how women are impacted in a larger societal context. Sport can dictate socially acceptable behaviors, including gender behaviors and cultural gender stereotypes.

For this reason, looking at the impact and issues women face in sport, with specific attention directed toward the significance of memorable messages received and recalled by professional female athletes is important. By choosing to look at professional female athletes, who are women in sport that have made it to the top of their respective profession, could shine light on how women are either able to overcome barriers and any problems that exist in the pathway to make it to the top or on the types of messages that allow females to have equal opportunity and thrive. Understanding what messages are memorable for success is important not just for the purpose of researching sport but could also apply to how women could be positively impacted in society, in general.

Women in Sport – The Gender Gap

Originally, the main assumption surrounding Title IX was that the issues associated with women's sport would cease if more women were empowered to take part in and develop leadership roles in sport. Indeed, Title IX has significantly increased the amount of women participating in sport but it has not necessarily fixed the problems women in sport face and subsequently may have also added to issues we see with body image, the media and gender inequality (Cooky & Lavoie, 2012).

Interestingly, since Title IX has been in effect, women working in collegiate sport administration has declined to a record low. Women now make up only 15% of the workforce with only 5 out of 120 Athletic Directors in Division 1 being female (Cooky & Lavoie, 2012). There are many proposed reasons as to why women working in sport are also just as marginalized as female athletes. Some reasons explain the fact that often women must outperform their male counterparts to gain respect, and they may feel pressured to conform to the organizational setting rather than trying to change it. This means that women feel they must tolerate unequal wages and limited chances for promotion along with confronting issues of sexual harassment (Cooky & Lavoie, 2012; Messner, Duncan & Cooky, 2003). Furthermore, women in general struggle due to the "old boys club" mentality (Messner et al, 2003) and often opt out of high profile and stressful positions to support roles in order to have a better work life balance (Cooky & Lavoie, 2012).

Even with the introduction of Title IX in 1972 and increased participation of women in sport, perceptions and values surrounding gender roles still exist (Hardin & Greer, 2009). Traditionally gender roles, despite the obvious biological and natural

differences, are socially constructed and the ways in which individuals understand their gender is through the way they are treated. For example, girls are associated with wearing pink and boys wearing blue. In addition, girls are encouraged to play with dolls — instilling caregiving and domestic skills — compared to boys who are meant to play with fire trucks and building blocks (Hardin & Greer, 2009). The way that women are socialized generally and in sport, can explain the gender gap that still exists within sport today.

The process of socialization can be explained by Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986). Bandura argues that cognitive factors, behavior and environmental agents shape attitudes and opinions and these attitudes are key players in the socialization process. Bandura emphasizes how important the media is in creating these attitudes and opinions, to the extent that society models the media. This is still a problem for women, and those who participate in sport, as they are severely underrepresented in the media meaning they are still under represented within sport (Hardin & Greer, 2009; Burton, 2015).

The issue with socialization is often that women in particular are encouraged to take part in activities that are gender appropriate. When children are young they are often introduced to sport based on gender roles and expectations (Hardin & Greer, 2009). When looking at the way children are socialized within sport at an early age, girls are often marginalized and boys are privileged in the athletic status system. Certain sports are sex typed, meaning some sports are not categorized as being feminine or being acceptable for women to participate in. This usually includes sports that have heavy lifting or rough and tumble aspects (Hardin & Greer, 2009) however taking into consideration that sport

in general is considered a masculine space, this makes it especially hard for females who want to participate in sports like shotput, weight lifting etc. (Grubb & Billiot, 2010).

There is a significant difference in the way women are treated in sport due to the nature of the sport and it is important to explore the masculinity of sports in more detail.

Exploring the masculine traits of sport, a study by Postow (1980) showed that being dedicated to a team atmosphere, having stamina and being competitive were perceived to be masculine which leaves no area for girls or women to flourish, at least in team sports. This kind of gender typing only promotes traditional gender roles where men are seen as being faster, stronger and better than women. There have been studies that have shown that sports are still being sex typed by following the traditional concept of gender roles (Koivula, 2001). However there could be some changes happening. The work of Solmon, Lee, Belcher, Harrison & Wells (2003) is one of the first studies to show gender neutrality within sport. Solmon et al, 2003 showed that some sports are now perceived as gender neutral like swimming, volleyball and tennis, whereas others like gymnastics are perceived as feminine and football and baseball are seen as masculine. Gender neutrality in sports has not been studied a lot since then but is promising. This could allude to the potential that perceptions in sport regarding gender roles maybe changing, however this has yet to be fully determined (Hardin & Greer, 2009).

Another factor to take into account with this problem is the issue of timing. A study by Greendorfer (1987) found that messages received at younger ages relating to participation within sport proved more definitive of sport participation compared to messages received later in life. This could help explain why although the number of girls participating in sport is on the rise, dropout rates are higher than ever especially in

adolescence (Sabo, 2009; Slater & Tiggeman, 2010). Women's involvement within sport remains problematic, despite organized efforts to address the clearly visible and understood discrepancies with legislation like Title IX.

The power of gender roles and the messages that are communicated to girls from a young age still very much follow the traditional outlook on women. This is promoted through the media, which in the US, has positioned itself as a “masculinist cultural center” (p.92, Messner, 2002). Media promotes the masculine sports culture that currently exists within society by showing and covering mainstream male sports predominantly and largely limiting women's coverage to gender appropriate sports such as gymnastics or figure skating. In contrast, women's basketball, men's shotput and men's discus are almost invisible in the media, which does not help in trying to change the gender perceptions that surround sport. Messner (2002) notes that ninety-four percent of children said they watched sports media on a daily basis, which is worrying as sports media ultimately serves as a key outlet for influencing children's views on gender, race and other big issues. Thus, sport media influence on gender is considerable.

Impact of the Media on Females

There is no doubt that along with socializing forces like coaches, teammates and judges that have an effect on an athlete's environment, the media also has a huge effect through the promotion of different stories and attitudes about sport. Fink (2015) analyzes how media historically has impacted women and the way it frames females in sport. Fink (2015) discusses how the 2012 the London Olympics were labeled the “Year of the Woman” because every country sent female athletes to the games — accounting for almost half of the athlete population — and because the level of performance in women's

sport had more competitive than ever before. However there is still a problem with the amount of coverage female athletes receive. It is worth noting that as the performance of women improved, they were still ignored by media. In fact, even though the number of women competing in sport is at an all-time high, media coverage has in fact decreased from 1989 in women's sport (Bianco, 2015). This decline of women's coverage is very much hidden, TV networks have been able to manipulate women's coverage by where they place the promotion of female sport, which is relegated to the edges of the screen allowing for more coverage of men's sport (Bianco, 2015).

Along with a decline in coverage, what remains is still very sexist in nature. The media often follows the formula of balancing a female's athletic performance with the traditional and accepted roles of females in society. Women are congratulated for balancing athletics with their roles as mothers or wives/girlfriends, which you do not see in men's sport coverage (Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013). One reason that women's coverage has dropped is due to the fact that making fun of female athletes is frowned upon in some communities and commentators have to be more careful of what they say regarding women's participation in sport (Cooky et al, 2013). Sport media chooses to sexually objectify female athletes and humorously treats female coverage to build a male audience, which only further marginalizes women and adds to the issues faced by women trying to be taken seriously within sport (Cooky et al, 2013; Messner et al, 2003). Overall, this helps explain why more girls and females are taking part in sport than ever before due to the success of Title IX, while media coverage is at an all-time low (Messner et al, 2003).

Another study by Trolan (2013) explains the portrayal of women in the media with particular attention focusing on the invisibility of women in sport. Women have the opportunity through sport to become more empowered within society and be positive role models. However with the introduction of Title IX in 1972 and more females participating in sport, there have been serious issues with how the media covers women's sport. The media continues to further the inequality that is seen in society between males and females, and until the media changes the way and amount it covers women's sport, women's sport will continue to be challenged. For example, women's events are usually gender marked by labeling them as women's events. Consider that the "Women's NCAA Final Four" is used versus simply "The Final Four" (Fink, 2013) on the men's side. Yet this is only one issue. The media also favors and objectifies women who are more graceful and feminine and who fit the idealized image of a female in society. This contributes to the negative environment in which female athlete's try to live up to an idealized image concerning their bodies and puts the emphasis on looks rather than physical athletic capabilities and accomplishments (Fink, 2013; Messner et al, 2003; Cooky et al, 2013).

Female Athletes and Body Image

One problem women face within the arena of sport is the issue of body image. According to existing research, body image is the value that an individual places on his or her body, the physical means taken to improve a person's body, and the evaluation made about the individual's satisfaction with his or her body (Abbott & Barber, 2011). The human body is multi-faceted in a sense that its purpose is not limited to one thing. Meaning at any given time the purpose of the body can range from a specific physical

function, or the goal can be purely aesthetic. That being said, an individual's opinion on his or her body can be related to factors such as the way his or her body functions, that is to say the physical processes and functions, or the way his or her body looks to the outside world, meaning the public appearance and perception of their body.

A functional body image is more concerned with the physical abilities and sees that as the purpose of the body. Generally, athletes are often more concerned with their body image as it relates to function rather than aesthetics (Abbott & Barber, 2011; Howells, 2012; Steinfeldt, Zakrajsek, Bodey, Middendorf & Martin, 2013). It is true that an athlete's body image tends to be more functional. However, athlete's bodies are evaluated by the public, specifically the media, on both a functional and an aesthetic level (Steinfeldt et al., 2013; Varnes, Stellefson, Miller, Janelle, Dodd & Pigg 2014).

Attempting to be satisfied in both function and aesthetics leads to lower self-esteem in these athletes. Female athletes tend to struggle in keeping a body that society deems feminine while also working towards an athletic body that will perform in high-intensity competition (Thomsen et al., 2004). The dissonance created from these two expectations can have a negative effect on the body image of female athletes.

When exploring the body image of female athletes it is also important to consider the sports that have been examined and the physical appearance of those athletes at the time of competition. Current research focuses on sports that tend to be more feminine such as volleyball, swimming, cheerleading, and gymnastics (Varnes et al., 2014).

Swimmers are timed rather than judged on their performance and their appearance does not necessarily play a role in their success as their body form is not being judged.

However, swimmers compete in swimsuits, leaving their entire body on full display and open to criticisms. The swim suits worn are not scandalous or sexual by any intention, rather they are designed to increase aero dynamics and reduce resistance which means they use the least amount of material to take away from the weight being dragged through the water. Less material means that more skin is on show which contributes to the vulnerability of women in swimming.

Swimming has been referred to as a lean-focused sport by many researchers (Abott and Barber, 2011; Howells, 2012; Varnes et al., 2014). Swimming is not exclusive to lean athletes, but since it is a speed sport, having a lower body mass index (BMI) and being on the leaner side increases the opportunity to succeed. Swimsuits also emphasize body shapes, increasing the chance that athletes will be thinner (Howells, 2012). As a result, swimmers are vulnerable to conflicting body issues because of the ability of their body to succeed in the water and the appearance of their body in their suits.

In particular a study by Reel (2013) focused on the weight issues that surround female athletes. Reel (2013) discusses the stress and pressures female athletes feel to change their body, weight, shape and size to match the “picture perfect” idea of being an athlete. Female athletes also tend to perceive their body as being bigger than it actually is, meaning that they tend to have disillusioned ideas of what their body actually looks like. Due to this immense stress and dysmorphia that female athletes tend to have about their bodies, this leads to higher rates of eating disorders and restrictive eating patterns among female athletes.

There are a significant amount of female athletes who suffer from disordered eating due to the unique pressures that exist within the arena of sport. Reel (2013) discusses how coaches, teammates, uniforms and judges are most likely to be responsible for contributing to the negative environment and inducing the pressure that is created for female athletes. Restrictive eating and disordered eating behaviors that have been reported by women in sport can range from unhealthy weight control habits to clinical and diagnosable disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa. Reel (2013) notes that more than twenty five percent of females engage in unhealthy weight control habits and between two percent to seven percent of female athletes meet the criteria for having a clinical eating disorder. This also exemplifies the vulnerabilities that women can develop within sport and the constructs of these vulnerabilities should be looked at more intensively.

The role of uniforms and their effect on athletes has been explored in a few different sports including volleyball, swimming, and gymnastics. Steinfeldt et al (2013) suggest that female athletes feel pressure to be thin in order to look good in their uniforms. Besides the pressure to be thin, female athletes also experience dissatisfaction with their body when they acquire too much muscle (Howell et al., 2012). More muscular bodies are often seen as masculine and swimsuits often emphasize the muscle tone in the swimmers bodies. It is apparent that within sport, there are different pressures and stressors felt and with the issue of body image, one could conclude that females that compete in sports where their bodies are on display more could be more at risk for unhealthy eating behaviors. This could be due to the aesthetic appeal of these sports (swimming, gymnastics, diving etc.) because their performance can be linked to the way they look and so therefore they have higher body image dissatisfaction compared to their

ball playing counterparts (Anderson, Bresnahan & DeAngelis 2014). Along with the emphasis on looks within these sports, these sports also require a leaner body mass of its athletes. Reel (2013) points out that in lean demanding sports, 47.4% of athletes are diagnosable for eating disorders versus 19.8% of non-lean demanding sports. This is a significant difference and needs to be seriously looked at within the community of sport, as almost half of women who participate in a sport that requires a lean body type could be diagnosed for an eating disorder.

Therefore, although female athletes from any sport could experience negative pressure based on their weight or body image, certain sports are definitely at more risk than others. This is due to the increased focus on appearance of these athletes, their lean body mass, and their performance in terms of uniforms and judges scores where their bodies are being scrutinized for flaws (Reel, 2013). Given the concerns about body image and the timing sensitivity of gendered messages, the next section considers how girls in youth sport are impacted within sports and the issues that are acute at the youth level.

Girls in Youth Sport

The arena of youth sports can be both positive and negative. Youth involvement in sport usually associated with positive youth development however there are underlying issues which need to be looked at. Following the trend of the increased amount of women participating in sport, the same applies to the arena of youth entering sport however we are seeing worrying trends of youth dropping out of sport at higher rates than ever before with over seventy percent dropping out of sport by the time they make it to high school (Jakobsson, Lundvall, Redelius & Engström, 2012).

The reasons for the high dropout rates in youth sport are due to issues of race, geography and gender. Girls in particular have been shown to be more at risk for dropping compared to boys and girls tend to enter sport later and dropout sooner (Woods, 2011). Youth sport is very important as it can help improve academic achievement, build higher levels of self-esteem, reduce behavioral problems and promote better psychosocial characteristics (Larson & Seepersad, 2003). The goal of youth sport is to learn lifelong skills such as discipline, teamwork and following leadership rather than focusing on a winning at all costs attitude, not to mention the most important aspect which is to enjoy taking part in sport. Youth that do not drop out and continue to stay involved in sport relates to the enjoyment of the sport whereby coaches, parents and support staff create a fun environment (Whitehead, Telfer & Lambert, 2013). The motivational climate is very important to keep youth involved in sport, and enjoying sport helps build self-esteem along with other psychosocial benefits (Adachi & Willoughby, 2014). With girls entering sport later and exiting sooner, they are being excluded from the benefits that youth sport can provide them.

Girls have been shown to take part in non-traditional sports, for example cheerleading versus boys who stick to traditional sports like basketball (Adachi & Willoughby, 2014). This could be an example at the youth level of how girls are choosing the “support role” rather than the more stressful role by choosing non- traditional sports versus traditional sports. Girls’ main reasons for dropping out of sport are gender specific. For example they did not feel competent enough, their school did not offer their sport for girls, and their peers were not supportive and boys teased them for taking part (Slater & Tiggeman, 2010).

Another important reason for dropout is because girls did not want to seem uncool by participating unless their friends were also participating (Slater & Tiggeman, 2010). The important thing to consider here is that girls during their youth are a lot more impressionable and may lack self-esteem during adolescence, especially in regards to the changes happening to their bodies (Mäkinen, Puukko-Viertomies, Lindberg, Siimes & Aalberg, 2012). Along with this girls in youth sport have also reported not being able to identify with the masculinity of sport and rated school work above participating in sport (Slater & Tiggeman, 2010). In youth sport we also see issues with uniforms as girls may feel uncomfortable wearing some uniforms because when they do not feel confident of how their bodies look.

The fact that these issues are occurring for girls in youth sport, which is meant to be a positive and nurturing experience, is worrying and likely feeds upward to the high school, collegiate and professional levels as athletes advance through the ranks. It is important to send the right messages to girls during their adolescence, and youth sport has the potential to help build self-esteem and build character if the right types of messages are being sent, especially to females who are vulnerable during this period. Those girls who successfully navigate youth sports and move into the professional ranks, which is a very small group of athletes, will then have to confront the issue of pay equity, which is taken up next.

Pay Inequity

The Women's Sports Foundation partnered with Evian Natural Spring Water in 1996 to analyze how women in sport were paid and compensated compared to their male counterparts. The article looked specifically at the differences between men and women

in terms of endorsements and total earnings to create the first comprehensive document called the “Women's Sports Foundation/Evian Athletes' Earnings Gap Index” (Women’s Sport Foundation, 1996).

The main finding of the Evian study was that although the number of females participating in the Olympic Games has doubled in the past 16 years, the amount of prize money female athletes receive is half of what is offered to men. Comparing this to women in the workforce who get paid 75% of what males in the same position do, female athletes suffer an even bigger gap and inequality in terms of pay at 50% of what their male counterparts make (Women’s Sport Foundation, 1996). There is a lot of variance depending on the sport, tennis has the closest gap between men and women and surfing has one of the biggest gaps in prize money being offered over a year period, with 3 million dollars being awarded to male surfers and 300,000 dollars being awarded to female surfers.

It is not impossible for women to make the same amount across their career compared to their male counterpart however the number of years to reach that amount could be significantly different. Sponsorships and gathering more support for women’s sport is one way to try and address this issue however this feeds into trying to change the way women’s sport is perceived, especially by the media.

Professional Female Athletes and Memorable Messages

Considering the issues faced by women and the mainstream messages promoted by the media and other driving forces, it is very important to carry out more research with females involved in sport. In this study, choosing to look at professional female athletes who have been successful in making it to the top of their respective sports could provide

more insight into whether females who are successful feel like they overcame negative messages and barriers to reach the top or whether positive messages empowered them to strive for success. There are two theories that help guide this work.

Feminist theory seeks to explain the gender inequality that we see existing between males and females within society. Feminist theory has evolved historically from singular versions of the theory to more pluralistic and comprehensive approach in the modern era (Roth & Bascow, 2004). Liberal feminism is the original take on feminist theory which although it has a rational approach to the concept of liberating women, leaves out the idea of the body and any challenges to the idea that a women's body is weaker than a man's (Roth & Bascow, 2004). The idea of the feminist theory within the realm of sport is to theorize about gender relations within a male dominated society and how this plays out within society through the channel of sport (Roth & Bascow, 2004). When discussing the types of memorable messages that professional females receive and how it could impact them, either positively or negatively feminist theory could help explain any gendered messages that are reported, especially as sport is regarded as a masculine space (Grubb & Billiot, 2010).

The second theory, which potentially may have more practical significance is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As previously discussed with girls in youth sport, there is a bidirectional relationship between enjoyment and self-esteem (Adachi & Willoughby, 2014). To get girls involved and keep them involved in sport necessitates creating the right motivational culture. The self-determination theory can explain what types of messages help girls stay motivated within a male dominated world of sport. The self-determination theory discusses how everyone has intrinsic motivation

to explore, take in and master their surroundings. The self-determination theory presents the idea that self-esteem is made up of three innate needs: competency, autonomy and relatedness. It is important that these three needs are met in order for the individual to have good levels of self-esteem. Autonomy represents the need for individuals to have power over making their own choices, competency means that people have the need to feel capable and be successful at a task and relatedness means that people have the need to feel connected to each other.

The basic nature of the self-determination theory explains that people are seeking meaning and need to connect with each other through cultural practices and nature (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-determination theory can address the issues seen in youth sport, helping focus attention on why girls have the need to participate in groups and why they feel able to do a sport. Self-determination theory can illuminate the types of motivational messages that affect female athletes. This insight could lead to creating a better motivational climate targeting women instead of the male dominant culture within sport, and could be a starting point for helping bridge the gap with the gender equality issues we see within sport. Also, sport is a cultural practice in which society takes part in through playing or watching sport. The self-motivation theory explains why females have just as much of a need to participate equally in the arena with sports alongside their male counterparts.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF MEMORABLE MESSAGES LITERATURE

There is an abundance of previous literature that has looked at memorable messages, however not necessarily in the realm of sport. Memorable messages have been defined as important communicative processes that aid in the socialization process, which have a major influence on the course of someone's life (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981). These are messages often provided by a mentor or someone senior to the recipient that provide guidance about behavior in a given context. As such, they work as a socializing force in social settings. Memorable messages have been researched in aging, health communication, and self-assessment and in other areas (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Keeley, 2004; Holladay, 2002; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001). Research has shown that memorable messages usually come from authority figures such as managers, trainers, parents etc. (Holladay, 2002; Keeley, 2004; Knapp et al., 1981) and the context of a memorable message has an impact on the content and theme of the message (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Kelley, 2004). Existing research on memorable messages provides a useful background in different areas.

Memorable Messages in Organizational Settings

Memorable messages, as previously discussed are impactful and contribute to the way processes of socialization happen across various settings. An early study by Stohl (1986), examined the structure, content, context and form of memorable messages within an organizational setting. Memorable messages were shown to include how an employee should behave in the organization and how to assimilate the behaviors of others in agreement with an overarching work culture. Messages within an organizational setting

work as a socializing force, providing guidance about how to behave in particular settings. This study looks at the importance of content, context and receptivity of the respondent with regard to whether messages are made memorable and have an impact on the recipient. Memorable messages within an organizational setting help deepen the understanding of how employees are acculturated within the work culture (Stohl, 1986). It is important to analyze these messages as they speak to the norms, values, rules, and expectations of the organizational culture in which they get shared.

Another study by Barge and Schlueter (2004) looks at the way memorable messages are associated with organizational entry. In this study, Barge and Schlueter, found that memorable messages were associated with the socialization of newcomers, where newcomers fit into an already established organizational pattern but developed their own individual capabilities. Memorable messages also highlighted the importance of face to face communication in individual-organizational settings as most were delivered in informal private settings. These messages became memorable because the recipient felt like they were being directly targeted due to the private informal setting. This study exemplifies how important the context and setting are to memorable messages.

A study by Dallimore (2003) looked specifically at women faculty being socialized into new university settings. This study discussed how new faculty who happen to be women, are often left to figure out their own occupational roles or socialized haphazardly into the organizational setting. Additionally, new female faculty tended to experience hostile work environments, which were not only discriminatory but also involved feeling marginalized. Within this study, women reported messages which

were all gender related compared to their male counterparts who reported no gender related messages. The messages which were most memorable within the organizational setting to the female faculty surrounded issues of work life balance, childcare concerns and also messages of discrimination and sexual harassment. These messages were delivered mostly by males and the messages which were delivered by females were usually coping strategies to help deal with the issues they were trying to cope with at work. This study is relevant as it shows how memorable messages can be gendered, which is of particular interest to the current research.

Memorable Messages and Health Care/Aging

Memorable messages are impactful as they give people benchmarks or reference points for the way they choose to behave or interpret the way they behave (Smith et al., 2001) and they can be offered and received at different points in one's life. For example, Holladay (2002) highlighted the importance of memorable messages as they dictate thoughts and behaviors, in this case in relation to aging. Like most memorable message data, Holladay (2002) analyzed the content, context and structure of the memorable messages from the recipient's point of view and found that most memorable messages came from people who were older than the recipient and overall were communicated through acts of good will and kindness.

Aging memorable messages were generally positive focusing on the benefits of getting older and embracing the natural process of aging, as well as the need to live life to the fullest and to take better care of oneself. In addition to the findings on aging memorable messages this study shows that taking into consideration the age of the recipient is important as people are more likely to report what resonates with them at the

current stage of life they are currently in—reinforcing the relevancy of the context of memorable messages. The influence of context also can be seen in memorable message research conducted in the healthcare context. For example, Anderson et al (2014) discussed memorable messages and weight control communication in males and females. They considered whether gender differences were being communicated about weight, what types of conversations were being had about weight, and what impact memorable messages related to weight had on recipients. They concluded that attending to these matters through memorable messages would allow for insight into creating public service announcements surrounding weight-based communication.

In other health-related work Keeley (2004) looked specifically at final conversations which have transpired with terminally ill patients from the survivor's perspective. The main themes of the messages shared were of a religious or spiritual nature and the messages reported included the need for a sense of comfort and community surrounding the survivor throughout the process. Keeley (2004) discussed the ways in which the memorable messages were framed and derived a set of “rules of conduct” for the survivor, which included how to cope after losing the patient, how to be involved in the terminally ill process and how to enact your religious or spiritual beliefs during the terminal illness and eventual death. Similarly, Smith et al (2009) examined the topics and sources of the memorable messages that are reported in regards to breast cancer in order to improve future efficacy of breast cancer efforts. Not surprisingly, in this particular setting memorable messages focused on early detection, awareness, treatment, and prevention. Messages derived from the media, friends, family, medical professionals and others. Lauckner, Smith, Kotowski, Nazione, Stohl, Prestin, Nabi,

(2012) extended this work by considering specifically messages that pertain to prevention as well as early detection and how those messages could help women if they were provided in a public service campaign.

Memorable Messages and Family Communication

Memorable message research has also been conducted within the realm of family communication. Waldron, Kloeber, Goman, Piemonte & Danaher (2014) examined the context, content and types of memorable messages reported by emerging adults within the family structure with a particular focus on how messages of morality were delivered within the family structure. The results showed that memorable messages were usually not planned in their delivery to the recipient, that they were delivered in the context of the family home and that they were usually communicated when the emerging adult was 16 years of age. The types of messages reported consisted of relational ethics, self-respect, honesty and being aware of careless acts of behavior. Looking at memorable messages within a family context also sheds light on the other functions of memorable messages. Of note, this work indicates that memorable messages can be delivered spontaneously and need not be planned. Additionally, in these instances memorable messages delivered by parents served to guide future behavior, help build individual morality, and assist with identity-making.

In related work, Wang (2014) considered memorable messages that were communicated specifically about education and college from parents to first generation students. These messages thematically reminded recipients to remember family, focus on family, and count on family, but also to not worry too much about family so that one could set a new example within the family structure.

Memorable Messages in Sport

While the concept of memorable messages has been studied in a number of contexts, the work in the area of sport is comparatively limited. Nonetheless, some does exist and is reviewed here. The first study bridges family and sport communication contexts by considering the types of memorable messages that sons and daughters receive from their father while taking part in sport (Starcher, 2015). This study is very interesting as it looks specifically at the power of the patriarch on his children within the realm sport — showing that fathers share messages with sons and daughters based on five things: effort, character traits, physical skills/performance, attention on others and having fun. It is significant to note that the memorable messages reinforce the role of the father as the parent who tends to socialize kids into sport (compared to mothers) and that the messages are applicable outside of the sport setting. This latter finding resonates with previous research on sport and memorable messages (Kassing & Pappas, 2007).

In other work, Kassing and Pappas (2007) examined memorable messages recalled by former high school athletes. They found that memorable messages were a means by which coaches created a motivational climate for athletes. For example, coaches along with parents and other main supporters were responsible for delivering messages which consisted of leadership, support, coping skills, managing burnout and athlete self-perception.

Given the capacity of memorable messages to act as a socializing force and to be context specific, they were chosen as the focus of this research. They seem an appropriate device for gauging how female athletes have been socialized into and through their sport experience. Moreover, this thesis focuses on a specific population of female athletes,

those that have reached the highest level of achievement (i.e., professional status). This sample in turn should provide insight in to how female athletes become socialized into sport generally and increasingly competitive levels of it. Thus, this research seeks to explore the types of messages that are most memorable to female athletes paying particular attention to the content, context and impact these messages have on the female athlete population.

Research Question

Even though the number of girls participating in sport has increased significantly over the past decade there is still a gender gap between the numbers of girls participating in sport compared to boys (Sabo, 2009). As previously discussed, girls have been shown to be more at risk for dropping out of sport than boys within youth sport (Woods, 2011). There are many suggestions regarding how to target girls specifically to get them involved initially and to keep them involved in sport. The main suggestion entails creating the right motivational culture fostered by coaches and parents (Adachi & Willoughby, 2014; Eys, 2013). This work seeks to learn more about how and if that motivational culture has been cultivated for girls/female athletes.

Generally speaking, society still perpetrates traditional gender roles and girls are socialized to adopt feminine behaviors. This is problematic in sport as research has shown that women who have achieved success within the sporting world display low levels of femininity and higher levels of masculinity compared to women who struggle within sport (Butt & Schroeder, 1980). Indeed, via messages shared in advertising, education and society generally, girls are already set up to struggle within the world of sport.

Studying messages received by women at the top of their sport is needed to see whether gendered messages compromised or motivated the sporting achievements of professional female athletes. Therefore the socialization process is critical as this informs us of how athletes are socialized into sport and the ways in which this happens. Considering the issues women face in sport and society we must consider the socialization process as being a critical component of this thesis study looking at memorable messages.

There is no previous research looking at professional female athletes and the types of memorable messages that are recalled in this population. Thus, this research represents an important extension of both the memorable message research and the gender and sport scholarship. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer one key research question:

What kinds of messages (positive or negative) do professional female athletes remember and what is the context and meaning of those messages?

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling using an already established network. Respondents were either acquaintances or participants recommended by fellow participants. At the time of the survey, all participants were professional female athletes and were sent an email describing the study and eligibility for participation. To qualify for participation, individuals had to be over the age of 18 and qualify as a professional female athlete, meaning they were not in college and were considered to be at the top level of their respective sport.

Qualitative survey questionnaires were carried out with twenty five ($n= 25$) participants; all surveys were taken online through the platform Survey Monkey, however one survey response was left blank apart from answering one demographic question and so this was eliminated from the sample, therefore twenty four survey responses were used in the final analysis ($n=24$). The total sample size was low, however it is still appropriate due to this study being exploratory in nature and one of the first looking at such a specific group of professional female athletes, which in itself is not a very large population.

The survey questionnaire was left open to take for 6 weeks and once the response rate had plateaued, the survey questionnaire was closed. In order to ensure anonymity and accuracy of the data, the function on Survey Monkey that can track the URL of respondents was turned off and the professional female athletes were told to only share

with other professional female athletes that they knew. By choosing to take the survey questionnaire respondents gave consent to taking part in this study.

The age of participants ranged from 21-36 years of age ($M= 25.4$, $SD= 3.33$). Respondents reported playing in a variety of different sports including golf ($n=10$), swimming ($n=5$), basketball ($n=3$) track and field ($n=3$), softball ($n=2$), and water-polo ($n=1$). The amount of year's respondents had been playing their sport ranged from a minimum of 9 years to 25 years. All participants were female with a minimum level of education of an associate's bachelor's degree through having a master's degree. Participants included athletes who currently play in the UK ($n=4$), Spain ($n=2$), Guatemala ($n=1$), Japan ($n=1$), Australia ($n=3$) and the USA ($n=12$) with 1 person not specifying a location who reported playing all over the world ($n=1$). Nineteen people within the sample reported being Caucasian, 4 people being Hispanic, and 1 person reported being multi-racial/other. All ethical requirements were followed according to ASU's research integrity policy, including participant's anonymity and answers.

Procedure

Using the information from an extensive literature review, questions were formulated in accordance with previous research on memorable messages. The traditional method of collecting memorable message data has been through survey interviews (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Keeley, 2004; Knapp et al., 1981; Stohl, 1986), however survey questionnaires have also been used to collect memorable messages in more recent research (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Holladay, 2002; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith et al., 2001).

The first page of the survey provided the respondent with a definition and an example of a memorable message, not relating to sport so that respondents were able to gain an understanding of a memorable message before taking the survey (Knapp et al., 1981). The questionnaire then asked the respondents to think of their experience as a professional female athlete and to recall and provide a memorable message that has stuck with them positively or negatively in some way. Additionally, respondents were asked to describe what they believed the meaning of the message was intended to be and the context in which the message was delivered (e.g., competition, practice, etc.). Respondents were then asked whether the message has had an effect on them as a female athlete. Finally, respondents provided demographic data about themselves and their sports experience.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was developed by Boyatzis (1998) in his work *Transforming Qualitative Information*. Thematic analysis involves "encoding qualitative information" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.vii) where the researcher develops "codes," phrases or themes that act as labels for parts of the data. Boyatzis explains that codes could be anything from a list of themes or a "complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms" (vii)". Boyatzis (1998) explains that there are many ways one could approach thematic analysis by basing the analysis off of theory-driven codes, which may come from a researcher's existing body of work, or other existing theories including inductive codes derived from the data based on previous research.

Thematic analysis is easy and flexible and themes are developed and molded based on the purpose of the research. Thematic analysis helps the researcher get closer to the data and develop a deeper understanding of the content. The process of thematic analysis allowed for the exploration of the themes which are apparent in female athlete's memorable messages. The primary analysis of the data included using an inductive approach based on previous work that had been developed by Kassing & Pappas (2008). The data was openly coded and developed and the themes were reworked and examined repeatedly – with the results of Kassing & Pappas (2008) helping guide the development of themes. However this work did not rely solely on categories that were already discovered by Kassing & Pappas (2008). Emergent categories were developed and refined until categories existed that were representative and inclusive of the data collected in this study.

Both myself and a colleague reviewed all of the messages and discussed the emergent themes in order to reach a consensus and level of reliability regarding the content and nature of themes. As both researchers discussed, tested and coded the data, this added to the validity of the analysis.

RESULTS

Impact

In order to answer the main research question, a total of 27 memorable messages were examined, which fell into two major themes and 5 categories (see Table 1). The 2 main themes identified were *Wisdom* and *Dedication*. Included within these two themes are the following categories: *Performance Wisdom*, *Instruction Wisdom*, *Instruction Dedication*, *Identity Dedication*, and *Motivation Dedication*. While the categories presented appear discreet, there is considerable overlap between them. To capture the overlap, the relationships between the themes and categories are represented by a graphic figure (see Figure 1). There is a lot of overlap between the categories which can be explained by Figure 1, with the category of instruction being the bridge between the two main themes of wisdom and dedication.

Overall the memorable messages reported were mostly positive in nature with only two participants reporting negative memorable messages. The negative memorable messages reported pertained to failure, however, the nature of the failure was different; one was listed as a negative form of motivation under *Dedication* and the other a negative instructional message under *Wisdom*.

The context of memorable messages reported by participants is also in line with past research by Kassing and Pappas (2007) where a majority of participants reported that the message had come from their coach. This aligns with the past literature indicating that coaches act as motivators and are the main agents responsible for providing the motivational atmosphere for athletes which applies the self-determination theory. The

self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2008) helps to explain how athlete's needs are met within sport and the messages which are important for meeting those needs in order to feel motivated to stay involved at a high level. This study did show more instructional messages being reported than Kassing and Pappas (2007) which is in line with past research (Turman & Schrodt, 2004; Zhang & Jensen, 1997) that coaches are meant to instruct and train their athletes which helps to explain why the category of instruction in this study acts as an important connector between our two main themes *Wisdom* and *Dedication*.

Wisdom and *Dedication* emerged as the two main themes as the definitions of each developed by the researchers are inclusive of all the data. *Wisdom* stands for developing and having experience and knowledge, as well as using good judgement generally and as it applies to sport.. *Dedication* on the other hand encapsulates the quality of being dedicated and committed to a task or purpose in training and competition. That is, applying oneself, being diligent and persevering within sport.

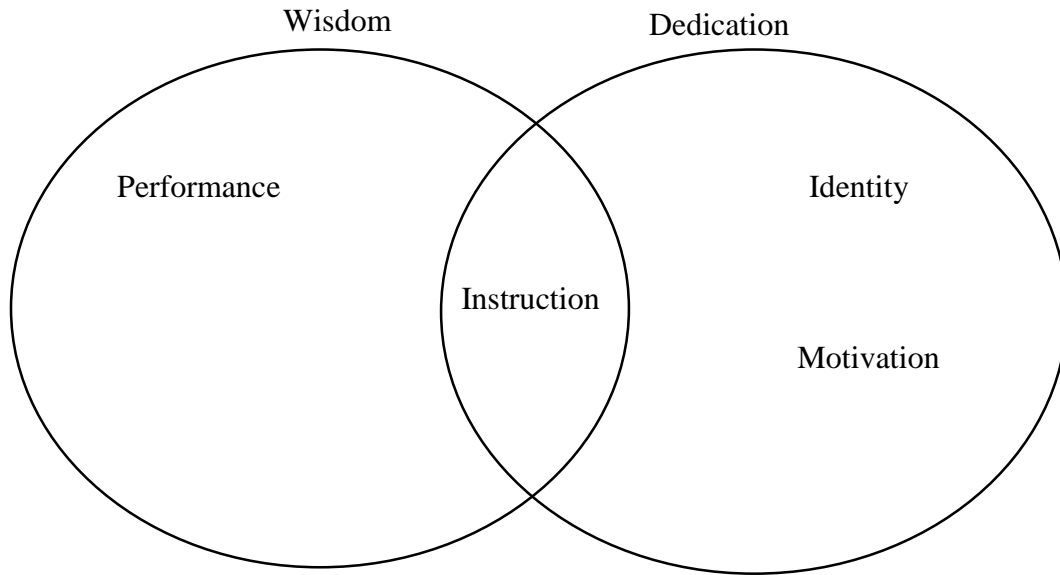
Table 1:

Definitions of the Memorable Messages Categories, Frequency and Impact on the Professional Female Athlete.

Memorable Message Category	Frequency	Positive	Negative	Definition
Under the theme of DEDICATION				
<i>Dedication: Instruction</i>	5	5	0	Educational messages about practice and commitment, expected outcomes from choices about preparation.
<i>Dedication: Identity</i>	6	6	0	Messages that refer specifically to the individual athlete and committing to a thought/process.
<i>Dedication: Motivation</i>	6	5	1	Messages of motivation that speak to hard work and dedication
Under the theme of WISDOM				
<i>Wisdom: Instruction</i>	7	6	1	Words of wisdom and taught truths that are applicable generally.
<i>Wisdom: Performance</i>	3	3	0	Performance psychology, dealing with nerves, positive mindset and reinforcement.
TOTAL				
<i>TOTAL</i>	27	25	2	

Figure 1:

Memorable Messages Thematic Interaction: Graphic Display



Overall the two main themes of wisdom and dedication manifested in slightly different ways. Dedication manifests in three different ways versus wisdom which manifests in two different ways. Dedication manifests as identity (talking about oneself), motivation, and instruction, which is cross-contextual. Wisdom manifests as instruction and as performance, where wise words help aid one's performance.

Dedication: Identity

Identity dedication represents messages which relate to the individual athlete, calling to the athlete's identity and how this in turn helps the athlete commit and be the best athletes possible. Within this theme, five of the memorable messages described by professional female athletes were positive and one was negative. The positive messages related to inspiring athletes to dedicate themselves completely to the sport and trust in their path ahead. For example an American golfer firmly remembers her coach repeatedly saying at practice:

“First you have to believe it and then you will see it”.

These types of messages where the athlete is being told to focus and hone in on their commitment. In their careers seem to be the most memorable and impactful to professional female athletes. The constant reminder of what it takes to get to the top is indeed an important message and as this female reported, it was also constantly repeated at practice by her coach, imbuing the message with high importance regarding what it takes to succeed. Through repeatedly hearing this message, the athlete was able to change her mindset, from a view of thinking things were impossible and unachievable to now keeping this as a mantra in her head, there to remind her to believe that she can accomplish anything.

Uniformly most messages came from coaches but in this category, memorable messages came from alternate sources on at least one instance. For example another American golfer recalled the message:

“Favorites don’t shock the world, you do”.

Interestingly, this message came from a motivational video meaning the athlete absorbed the information in the message through a 3rd party source and not directly from a coach. However this message still helped the athlete, reminding her that she can achieve as much as any other player in the field by putting in the same amount of effort. By believing this, the athlete is more dedicated and believes she is not just a “spot filler” but rather that she has as fair a chance as any other athlete in the field to achieve success and that she deserves a spot to play. A swimmer from Scotland reported a message which was very similar in nature by saying:

“Someone is going to do it, why can’t that person be you?!”

This message is similar to the athlete before however it promotes a more internal lens of motivation – that is the athlete is focusing on herself rather than measuring up or worrying about the rest of the competition. The difference in this message is the fact that the only person who could stop her from achieving her goals and success is herself – the only reason she won’t reach the goal is if she limits herself. Comparing these two messages highlights the different loci of focus for motivating athletes. In one, the comparison is with competing athletes whereas in the other it is centered on improving oneself.

There was one message within this category that had an obvious negative twist. An American golfer reported being told:

“You are the laziest all-American in the country”.

This message was delivered by the athlete’s coach to try and instill more dedication within the athlete however the athlete reported this message as being more damaging than positive, and in fact was understood as an attack on her character. This is an example of a message that failed to serve any positive purpose or help the athlete. While intended to be motivational it is clear that this tact did not work with this particular athlete and instead was taken as a personal affront and attack on the identity of the athlete. As such, it raises questions about the utility of using negative memorable messages in an effort to inspire athletes. Something unable to be addressed in greater detail here due to the small sample size, but worthy of consideration in future research. These messages then emphasize dedication but link dedication directly to identity—highlighting the need to cultivate athletic identity as part of the larger motivational structure for female athletes.

Dedication: Motivation

Motivation dedication is the next category that emerged from the data. These messages represent athlete’s dedication to hard work and motivation to push themselves as far as possible in their day to day preparation and practice. These messages are ones that could help anyone who is trying to be successful, not just within the arena of sport. Accordingly, they prove to be cross-contextually motivating. A perfect example of this was reported by a Spanish golfer:

“Never give up and nothing is impossible”

This is a prime example of motivation dedication. Not only does the athlete feel that this message gives her a reason to push her mental boundaries and achieve to the highest level she can (motivation), but it also confirms that motivation and dedication can be limitless. This message was originally delivered to the athlete after a tournament and then was reinforced on a daily basis by her coach in practice. This is interesting as the message was not only delivered once, but was reinforced on a daily basis helping to create a dedicated motivational space to push the limits and work as hard as possible.

Similarly, a swimmer from the USA also discussed hard work within this theme. She shared the following memorable message:

“Hard work always pays off”

This message also emphasizes the need for dedication but hints as well at the reward associated with remaining motivated to do the hard work. Being an athlete at the top of her career, this message has helped her develop through her athletic career to the top by putting her failures at competitions into perspective so that she can remain focused on hard work despite immediate results as she has come to understand that results will come eventually. This message was delivered in practice by her coach and also after not making the Olympic team. This message stuck with her throughout these times though and she explains how this memorable message helped her go on to win a silver medal at the World Championships the following year. A track and field athlete from the USA reported a very similar message saying:

“Hard work beats talent, when talent doesn’t work hard”

Interestingly, even though the nature of the message is the same in that hard work will pay off, this message lends an extra perspective in claiming that more talented

competition can be overcome through hard work and dedication. A coach at practice also delivered this message, exemplifying how coaches create a motivational space for athletes to excel. Lastly, in this category there was one message which focused on the aspect of failure. A swimmer from the UK reported the following message:

“Don’t let one failure make you believe you are a failure. Pick yourself up and come back stronger”.

When focusing on being motivated and dedicated, it is unusual to raise the issue of failure. Yet this message, which clearly does that, has served an important purpose for the athlete that shared it. She is an Olympian in her sport and the message reminds her that an athlete’s failures should not be a defining factor within an athletic career. Failure does not compromise talent and should not affect the level of confidence an athlete should have in their ability to achieve. This message is a motivator to overcome disappointing moments and perform better in the future. In this case, memorable messages again emphasize dedication but herein connect dedication to the motivation necessary to be a topflight female athlete.

Dedication: Instruction

Another important theme that arose from the analysis was instruction dedication. Instruction dedication incorporates messages that contain moments of education, teaching and learning for the athletes while also reiterating the importance of dedication — whereby mastery is achieved through instruction and dedicated practice. The first message to look at within this category was offered by a golfer from the USA:

“Fall in love with practicing”.

This message is similar to the category before in terms of touching on work ethic and practice however this is an instructional message to help the athlete learn that practicing will be the most important factor to concentrate on in order to compete well. The true meaning of this message is that if the athlete wants to get better at her sport, it won't be "work" to get there, even though there will be hard moments of pain and struggling because being in love with practice suggests that the effort necessary will never feel like true work. This message was given by the athlete's father reinforces how influential and impactful family members can be. And it was provided very early in the athlete's career at 12 years of age. The athlete claims that it helps her get through practice and helps her stay at the top of her career. Similarly, an Australian basketball player recalled this message:

"Train the way you expect to play"

Whereas another Australian basketball player offered the following:

"You play the way you train"

In both cases the connection between performance in games and the dedication required in practice is apparent. Both make it clear that dedicated training will lead to better performances and infer that poor training will lead to poor performances. In the first instance the message was delivered by a coach at practice where the athlete was spending extra hours at practice trying to perfect her shot. This message has stuck with her as a lesson to train smarter rather than harder. The athlete explains how she had been going through a hard time, not performing or underperforming and no matter how many extra hours she spent at the gym the results were not necessarily paying off. Her coach gave her this instructive message to indicate that should try more intense shots as if she

were in the game rather than spending hours just doing one shot after the other. In the latter case the message also was delivered by the head coach during a training session. Here the athlete came to understand that just turning up to practice and going through the motions was not enough. Instead she needed be intense during practice as much as she would be during a game. Together these messages speak to the need for female athletes to commit to training hard, smart, and consistently.

Alongside dedication, wisdom was a major theme represented by a set of subthemes. These are discussed in the section that follows.

Wisdom: Instruction

Instruction wisdom was the first category that was identified within wisdom. Through the data, the theme of instruction is a strong overlapping point and seems to be popular within this group of professional female athletes. This category represents instructive life lessons and educational messages that provide the athlete with pieces of good judgment. As such they have broader applicability than messages focused primarily on training and practice. For example, a softball player from the USA shared this memorable message:

“Greatness is a way of life”

This message was delivered by the athlete’s coach and seems to suggest that greatness achieved in one place translates to achieving it elsewhere in life. The athlete confirmed this interpretation suggesting that she took it to mean that she should try to be great in all aspects of her life and that there is a bi-directional relationship with being a great person in the community and being the best athlete she can be.

This is an important life lesson and one that she has adopted and has helped her get to the top of her sport. Relating to aspects of character, a Spanish water-polo player recalled this message she remembered hearing:

“It’s not what happens to you but how you react on it”

This message was delivered by the athlete’s coach and she recalls this message as a way of helping her put a positive outlook on bad situations, not just in athletics but also in life. This athlete also suggests that there is a strong relationship with the way you deal with bad situations in life and in athletics, reporting that she has learned to put situations in life and in athletics in perspective, which has ultimately helped her become a better athlete and a better person. Similarly, an Australian basketball player reported hearing this memorable message:

“Rome was not built in a day”

This message speaks to the value of patience and was delivered in practice by a coach who wanted the athlete to understand that good habits within practice take time to build and develop. This taught the athlete that results are not immediate, that hard work will eventually pay off, and that it was most important to focus on the process. The athlete reported that this message has helped her to not be so hard on herself and believe in the process and the work she has been putting in to become more successful. These examples and others like them show how instruction wisdom was both applicable to the sport context in which athletes found themselves but also valuable outside of that context.

Other examples in this category captured messages that were comparatively the most generic and easily applicable outside the sport domain (e.g., “Control the controllables” and “Greatness is a way of life”). They also tied into the theme of

dedication showing how instruction is a bridge between the two main themes. In particular, the behavioral implications suggested that female athletes should strive to control what is within their power and dispense with worrying about those things that are not. And that they should exemplify greatness not only in sport, but in life generally. These messages differ from other categories as they are overarching messages that are very simple in their nature.

Wisdom: Performance

This category contained messages that spoke specifically to performance. They also emitted a sense of wisdom though, being applicable generally and not only within the sport context. For example, a golfer from the USA shared her college coach's efforts to use alliteration to make a performance message memorable. She shared that he used to reference:

“The 7 P's, proper prior planning prevents piss poor performance”

Another USA golfer shared that her coach used to say:

“If you're nervous it means you care”

In both instances these golf coaches are instilling wisdom about being prepared to perform (i.e., preparation is linked to performance and nervousness is expected). In the latter case the message taught the athlete how to react to competition in a better and wiser way by emphasizing that nerves can be a positive emotion and when addressed accordingly can be beneficial to one's performance.

The Question of Gender

Studying female athletes at the highest levels of their respective sports, one would expect to find some gendered commentary that has become memorable. Yet this did not

seem to be the case. In fact, none of the messages in the sample were gendered.

Historically across many subjects, gender gaps and gendered messages have existed especially within the arena of sport and so the fact this is not apparent here could be a positive indicator that sport is becoming a more neutral space for women's participation.

There may be several reasons for this. First, this cohort because of their elite status skirted gendered messages as they were more than likely surrounded by high-level coaches from an early age. Second, perhaps this group ignored and dismissed gendered messages as they would have impeded or derailed their clear drive for sporting success. Resilience against such messages may have been a valuable tool to keep them on track for athletic success. Conversely, it is possible that females who dealt with gendered sporting messages ineffectively may have let those interfere with their sporting progress. This is most certainly at the root of the dropout issues plaguing girls in sport. The hope that this cohort could shed some light on that phenomenon however did not materialize.

What is evident from this study is that most of the messages derived from coaches, which falls in line with previous research in memorable messages in sport (Kassing & Pappas, 2007) and emphasizes again how important the role of a coach can be on an athlete's career and how vital coach-athlete communication remains.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

In conclusion, this study examined a very under studied area looking at memorable messages with professional female athletes. Even though research on memorable messages is considerable, not many studies have been done within sports. This is the first study to look at professional female athletes and messages that have been memorable and impacted them. This study hopes to advance research on memorable messages and to extend research examining female athletes. Addressing the historical issues with women in sport and how the media creates messages that inform societal norms, this work focuses on memorable messages with the intent of not just addressing gender equal in sport but also in society. As previously mentioned in this thesis study there is a close relationship between media, society and sports. Therefore, studying women in one setting should have implications for the other settings as there is a feedback loop between women in society, women in the media and women in sport.

Utilizing thematic analysis offered a practical and flexible approach to interpreting and analyzing the memorable messages that were reported by the professional female athletes. Thematic analysis works towards developing or generating new theories regarding some aspect of society by discerning the effects of language which can be applied to many different settings and within this study the setting is memorable messages and sport. Yet the messages reported here went against what has been seen in past research regarding gender and sport. But the findings were in line with previous sport research on memorable messages, confirming the importance of coach-athlete communication (Kassing & Pappas, 2007). Most of the memorable messages in

this study were delivered by coaches. For these elite athletes coaches served as a primary motivational source but also as sources of wisdom, teachers, and generally influential characters within athlete's careers.

When looking at research looking at women in sport, there is still a long way to go with the way that women are socialized and treated within athletics and society. The hypothesis going into this thesis study was that messages reported by professional female athletes would be gendered, either in a positive or negative way. This was not seen in this study showing that potentially there could be a shift happening where perceptions are starting to change and female athletes are not being given so many gender related messages. The fact that all of the messages, apart from two, were positive paints a very bright future for women in sport, however this study did not ask about gendered messages specifically and so this may just be an artifact of the questionnaire design and thus any conclusions about the positivity of the messages should remain tempered.

However it is still interesting that no gendered messages were collected and this needs to be developed more as there could be other reasons as to why the messages collected were predominantly positive and unrelated to gender issues. The messages could be unrelated to gender and be positive due to the population being looked at, professional female athletes who are at the top of their careers may be more motivated naturally compared to other athletes or the general population which is why they are so successful. Also, the messages could be unrelated to gender either because professional female athletes could be more resilient or tougher compared to other women in sport and society, and so they either do not pay attention to gendered messages or those messages are not necessarily important to them. In addition to this, it could be that professional

female athlete's focus on messages which help them succeed rather than reporting messages which may have been negative or gendered.

It was very interesting that across multiple sports, no messages arose concerning body image or uniforms and there were no sexual comments, which contradicts what has been seen by women in organizational settings and (Dallimore, 2003). According to the Task Force on the Sexualization of Women established by the American Psychology Association (2010), sexual objectification of women athletes in the media has been steadily increasing over the last ten years. Indeed, many Olympic athletes have admitted that being "sexy and sassy" (Krupnick, 2012) is a part of their sport and one of the reasons why people love viewing it. Other female athletes have admitted that their bodies are not always judged on their athleticism but on how they look on the court (Steinfeldt et al., 2013). Some of this sexualization of female athletes stems from their uniforms. Female athletes are often concerned with their physical appearance while competing in their uniforms. This is particularly relevant to specific sports like volleyball, gymnastics, swimming, and cheerleading where uniforms direct focus onto the physical appearance of the athlete (Steinfeldt et al., 2013). Within this study, there were some swimmers and other Olympic athletes who took the survey and so the fact that they did not report a memorable message that regarded their body or how they are perceived within the athletic world is very positive and an important note to make. This means that even though these issues are big within women's Olympic sports, with females who are at the top of their career they may be more stable in their body image compared to other female athletes who are not at the professional level.

The self-determination theory provided the perfect framework to help analyze the messages collected as the messages collected were positive in nature and included aspects of motivation, dedication and wisdom. The self-determination theory can also help explain why the messages collected were positive and unrelated to gender issues due to the fact this population of professional female athletes seem to be highly driven and self-sufficient. As previously discussed the self-determination theory can explain how female athletes become motivated and stay involved in sport. The self-determination theory explains that everyone is born with an intrinsic motivation to explore, absorb and master their surroundings and that self-esteem and motivation to succeed happens when the three innate needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The data examined here certainly suggest that coaches and athletes understand the aspects of self-determination and speak to it through the exchange of memorable messages.

The data collected within this study were complex and overlapping, not easily categorized into discreet domains. However, that limitation aside, what was discernible is that memorable messages delivered to top-level female athletes incorporate several key themes — mainly dedication, wisdom, and instruction coupled with performance, identity, and motivation. These are factors that clearly go a long way in defining athletic success. Thus, it is refreshing to see that these sporting characteristics manifest quite robustly when coaches cultivate elite female athletes over the course of their career. This is particularly relevant when one considers that many of the participants claimed to have held onto memorable messages that they recalled for many years (i.e., from comparatively early on in their careers).

The findings are revealing in that they suggest that females who are at the professional level receive motivational messages that could be offered just as readily to their male counterparts. Indicating that potentially, at least at the professional level, the mental/motivational treatment of female and male athletes is equivalent. However, achievement of elite status and professional standing does not guarantee the same outcomes for female athletes. For example, pay equity remains an issue as female athletes tend to make considerably less compared to their male counterparts.

Interestingly, identity dedication had a strong presence within the data. This shows how professional female athletes are receiving messages that help them find ways to forge ahead and inspire them to be better on a day to day basis. This shows how professional female athletes in this study are not necessarily being held to a different standard than their male counterparts, they are being treated on an equal level in terms of becoming successful within the world of athletics. Professional female athletes are reporting messages that reference identify with regard to strength of mind and body indicating that previously held notions of masculinity in sport may be suspended for elite female athletes. For example, messages such as “someone is going to do it, why can’t that person be you” or “favorites don’t shock the world, you do” show strength of character, competitiveness and determination to succeed. Previous research has shown that being dedicated to a team atmosphere, having stamina and being competitive are perceived to be masculine attributes (Postow, 1980). However, in this study we are seeing how female athletes identify with these traits. This shows that there is progress that has been made with women in sport, but this should be acknowledged cautiously as there is much more progress to be made.

Furthermore, there is evidence in the current findings that coaches are teaching female athletes to be wiser, smarter and tougher athletes. It seems that coaches may be influential outside of just impacting athletes, that they could also be the main driving force to change the nature of sports and women in sport overall. Coaches seem to be mentoring professional female athletes to be the best, toughest and smartest athletes they can be contrary to traditional efforts to marginalize female athletes and protect sport as a masculine domain. Coaches also seem to be concerned with these female athletes outside of sport. Some of the messages delivered spoke to how coaches deliver messages which are character builders, not only making the athlete better in sport but also within the community.

Overall, this study refers back to the importance of the socialization process that women go through in sport and society. Some of the key findings in this study, which showed identity as being a key category within the data, are relevant as we consider the socialization of women in sport and how identities are constructed. As previously mentioned, the way that women are socialized generally and in sport, can explain the gender gap that still exists within sport and in the workplace today. Thus, continued examination of the socialization process is warranted. It is especially important as it pertains to the messages women are receiving and how such communication influences their performance, general experience, and success in sport.

Limitations of Present Study

There are a couple of limitations that this study that should be discussed. There was a very small sample with a total of 25 responses collected across multiple sports around the world. It is possible that the small sample size means that these results should

be taken cautiously and that this study should be replicated with a larger sample size. Doing so would verify if these trends of positive messages and non-gendered messages truly exists within this population.

This survey was distributed between January and March of 2016, which falls within 6 months of the 2016 Olympics. The reason why such a small sample was collected could be due then to the fact athletes are concentrated on training and travelling to the upcoming Olympic Games. Six months out from the Olympic Games is when most athletes enter the most stressful period trying to qualify and train for the Olympics. Due to the fact that most of this sample was drawn from Olympic sports, it is possible that many athletes were not paying attention to surveys arriving in their email or that they chose not to sacrifice time taking the survey. If this study was to be done again, distributing it at a time in the off-season or preseason for Olympic sports could draw a better response rate.

Moreover, this population is protected. So the approach taken to use a snowball sampling technique accessing people through the acquaintance network of the researcher proved effective but limited. Different sampling techniques might produce additional respondents. Also it would have been useful if in the survey required respondents to report their nationality. Having this demographic information could lead to future conclusions about sport socialization for women across different national contexts.

One last major limitation in this study is that no questions about gender were actually asked. The data were collected under the assumption that gendered messages would surface naturally, however this work indicates that asking about gendered messages may be necessary, particularly within a population of elite athletes. The

absence of gendered memorable messages must be considered an additional limitation of the work.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

In conclusion more research needs to be done within this population and memorable messages. It would be interesting to explore why messages are not gendered and to include gender related questions to tease out whether gender still plays a prominent role within sports at the professional/elite level. It also would be interesting to speak to elite/professional coaches of female athletes to learn more about how they craft and construct memorable messages. The alliteration examples suggests that some consideration goes into their efforts. Likewise, it would be helpful to solicit memorable messages from non-elite/professional female athletes to see if the gendered messages show up in a different subpopulation. If so, that would suggest that memorable messages may act as a deterrent to girls staying in sport. Determining if this is the case would allow for some proactive efforts to educate youth sport administrators, coaches, and parents about gendered memorable messages and their effects. In short, this work raises many questions that ideally can be answered in future efforts.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT USED TO COLLECT DATA JANUARY – MARCH 2016

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Screener

Dear Participant,

We are a faculty member and student in Communication Studies at Arizona State University. We are conducting research to examine memorable messages and professional female athletes. In particular we are interested in what types of messages are remembered (positive or negative), the meaning and context of the messages and whether they have any effects on professional female athletes.

To qualify for participation you must be over 18 years of age and have played a sport professionally. Participations entails completing an online survey that should take about 15 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can skip questions if you wish. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses to the survey will be used to develop greater insight into memorable messages that are reported by professional female athletes. To ensure that your responses remain anonymous no identifying information (e.g., name, phone number, etc.) will be collected. Thus, your responses will be anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known. Results will only be shared in the aggregate form.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the primary researcher Robyn Matthews at (+1) (480) 347-8945 or robyn.matthews@asu.edu or Dr. Jeff Kassing at (+1) (602)-543-6631 or jkassing@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (+1) (480) 965-6788.

Completion of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.

Introduction

The following questionnaire asks about your experience as a female athlete. We are particularly interested in memorable messages you may have heard while playing sport. Memorable messages are those that we are able to recall easily from the past because they have left an impression with us. For example, a coach may have told you “Every battle’s not worth fighting” to show that you have to pick and choose which issues to spend your energy on.

We would like you to think about your career as a female athlete in order to recall a memorable message. Certainly there have been times when people said things to you

(positive or negative) that related to being a female athlete. These messages probably stuck with you in some way.

Once you have a message in mind, please follow the prompts below.

Questions

1. Please clearly state the memorable message in its entirety in the space below.
2. Now please describe what you thought was meant by the message.
3. Next, please provide as much detail as you can about the situation in which the message was shared. For example, did it occur during training or practice, while traveling, during a game, etc. Also provide information as well about the source of the message (e.g., coach, trainer, teammate, fan, etc.).
4. What effect did this message have on you as a female athlete?

Finally, please respond the following demographic questions.

5. What sport do you play professionally?
6. Where (in what country) do you play professionally?
7. How long have you played this sport? (please answer in years)
8. What is your current age?
9. What is your race/ethnicity? (select one)
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Caucasian/White
 - Native American/Alaskan Native
 - African-American
 - Hispanic
 - Other Multi-Racial
 - Prefer not to answer
10. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? (select one)
 - did not complete high school
 - completed high school
 - completed some college coursework
 - completed an associate's degree
 - completed a bachelor's degree
 - completed a graduate degree